



Influenza Epidemic or Not?

Forty seven states have currently reported a widespread outbreak of the influenza virus. As the United States continues to see a rise in reported cases of influenza, the Navy and Marine Corps mission readiness may potentially be affected as well. It is mandatory for all active (this includes current reservists) military to have the immunization, unless medically or administratively exempt. Using data from the CDC, the United States is still 60% vulnerable to the flu virus but not too different from the 2011-12 season. The Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center reports "Influenza-like-illnesses (ILI) are at peak levels for moderately severe influenza seasons".

IMPORTANT NOTE: This year's vaccination for the H3N2 strain is a good match to current circulating strains of the virus. Because of the military's proactive health approach, currently, the Navy and Marine Corps active population have approximately a 95% vaccination rate and there have been less reported cases of ILI this year among our Fleets.

Get the Facts!

The NMCPHC Preventive Medicine directorate recommends that everyone over the age of 6 months gets the flu vaccine unless you have certain allergies or illness that may contraindicate a successful vaccination. The demographics of those most affected in the Navy and Marine Corps population are children under the age of 17 and adults age 65 and older.

Annual vaccination is the #1 way to reduce risk of getting the flu since the flu virus changes each year (www.cdc.gov). Both the injectable and nasal spray vaccines allow antibodies to develop in your system and protect against infection, so both forms are effective. Pregnant women should only be getting the injectable flu vaccine. While some individuals may experience flu-like symptoms, the flu vaccine will not cause the flu.

Signs and Symptoms

If you have the flu, you will know it! "Generally, influenza has feverish symptoms over 101 degrees, comes with major body aches, and can last for several days" said LCDR Mark Humphrey, MD, MPH. "You may also experience chills, coughing, head ache, sore throat, runny nose or congestion."

Availability of Vaccine

The NMCPHC reports there is not a shortage of the vaccine and that vaccines are free and still available at Military Treatment Facilities (MTF's) for eligible beneficiaries. Vaccinations are also available through TRICARE network healthcare providers and participating pharmacies or a local Health Department. If you go somewhere other than a MTF, find locations near you at <http://flushot.healthmap.org>.

Recommendations from the NMCPHC Preventive Medicine Directorate

1. Wash your hands!
2. Maintain a clean work environment and practice good overall hygiene.
3. If you have a medical appointment, try and find a caregiver for your children during that time so they don't have to attend with you.
4. When scheduling appointments with your healthcare provider, indicate whether or not it is a well visit as some doctors offices have separate waiting rooms for those that are well and those that are sick.
5. If your children are sick, let them stay home instead of sending them to school.
6. If you have to sneeze or cough, instead of covering your mouth with your hands, use the crease of your elbow and forearm.

For more information on influenza, visit www.cdc.gov or www.flu.gov

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